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By Patrick Hamilton

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Region short by nearly 40 doctors, study shows

By DENNIS SMITH
Special to The Champion

Web sites, job fairs and requests for assistance are all part of plans to bring more family doctors here.

Halton's physician recruitment co-ordinator says the region is short by nearly 40 doctors, with about 13 more needed in Burlington.

Angela Sugden-Praysner said each community is taking different approaches to filling the gap.

"There are benefit packages and moving allowances," she said. "And Milton and Halton Hills are considered under-served."

Burlington is also seeking an under-served designation from the Province. This would make it eligible for Ministry of Health grants to attract doctors to the city.

Ministry application forms are being sent to Burlington, said the City's general manager of development and infrastructure.

Once these are returned to the ministry, it takes about eight weeks to decide if Burlington is under-served, said Leo DeLoyde.

An endowment fund for Burlington medical students is being established through the Burlington and Ontario Medical

Associations and the Burlington Community Foundation.

Ms Sugden-Praysner said six physicians in training have recently toured parts of Halton. She said they'll be finishing their residency in July and are seeking a place to practice after that time.

A key marketing tool for Halton is a Web site launched last fall.

"Lots of physicians and residents are using it to find out about Halton," said Ms Sugden-Praysner. "There have been almost 7,000 hits to the Web site and we get a lot of e-mail. They're interested in finding out about Halton."

Web site shows opportunities, specific needs in Halton

The site — www.physicianopportunities.ca — lists the opportunities and specific needs in Halton.

Elsewhere in the region, 10 doctors are needed in Oakville, 15 in Halton Hills and one in Milton.

Ms Sugden-Praysner noted Milton has succeeded in recruiting seven doctors during the past year.

But she expects doctor retirements will create concerns for the next 15 years. "Their average age is 40 to 50 and they'll be thinking about when they're going to retire."

Ms Sugden-Praysner has toured Ontario's five medical schools and will soon visit Montreal. A career day for opportunities outside Quebec is being held there by the Quebec Association of Interns and Residents.

Representatives from Urgent Care Canada, whose Burlington office hosts several doctors, unsuccessfully urged city council to provide financial support for new doctors.

Their representatives argued there is much competition to obtain physicians, plus enormous growth in Burlington's north end.



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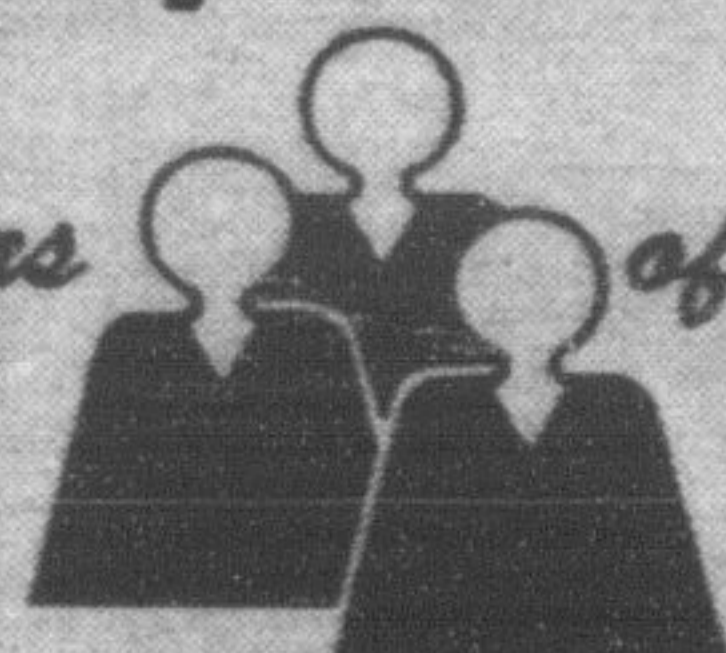
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Region has own reference library now

Residents now have information at their fingertips concerning what's happening at Halton Region.

Last week a reference library opened at regional headquarters, located at 1151 Bronte Rd., which allows people access to accurate and timely information about public issues currently before regional council.

Called the Halton Citizen Reference Library, it contains a computer terminal, printer/copier and a phone.

Halton residents will be able to obtain copies of Halton documents including staff reports, the Official Plan and the budget, among other things.

Material will be available to read, download, photocopy, research or obtain by request.

If a document is available in hard copy only, a resident can fill out a request form and the material will be sent to the given mailing address.

There may be a fee for printing large documents.

The library will be open Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. Evening appointments can be made at the Region.

For more information, call the Region at (905) 825-6000.